

Probable Congo Bay Owl *Phodilus prigoginei* in Burundi

The type and only specimen of the Congo Bay Owl was obtained at Muusi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (03°04' S, 28°48' E, 2430 m) in March 1951 (Fry *et al.* 1988). A report of a probable second occurrence of the species, on Rwegura Tea Estate in Burundi, appeared in Collar & Stuart (1985), Fry *et al.* (1988) and Butynski *et al.* (1997). We believe this refers to an unpublished observation made by ourselves in a different location and so decided to place the facts on record. PWPB communicated this observation to Leslie H. Brown in Nairobi in 1980, with the expectation that it would thus find its way into *The Birds of Africa*. However, Collar & Stuart (1985) apparently got incorrect data from another source and this was later quoted in Fry *et al.* (1988).

On 15 December 1974, in the forest near the tea plantation at Teza, Burundi (astride the Congo-Nile watershed, approx. 03°10' S, 29°35' E and 2500 m, some 25 km south of Rwegura and 85 km east of Muusi), at about 15:00 we were bird-watching along a well-trodden trail. LB spotted, with the naked eye, an owl perched on a branch about 3 m from the ground. It was very tame and allowed close approach, to about 2 m. We both saw the bird well but do not recall for how long we watched it before it flew away. It resembled a small Barn Owl *Tyto alba* and seemed to be about 25 cm in length. It had a buff, heart-shaped face with dark eyes, no ear tufts and a short tail. Upperparts were mottled red-brown and black, underparts buff spotted with black.

We had been along this trail several times during 1974 and went again on 1 January 1975 and several times during that year but did not see an owl on any other occasion. No pellets were observed on the ground.

The forest was on steeply sloping terrain and the trail entered the forest downhill from highland grassland. The distance of the owl inside the forest was not noted at the time. To our recollection it was not more than 100 m and may have been less. The forest consisted of mixed species of large and small trees with little underbrush. The canopy was dense. However, LB recalls seeing sky at the same time as seeing the owl, which may indicate that it was near the edge of the forest.

Since this observation was made there have been two other reports of the species: the call suspected to be of this owl recorded from the mountainous Nyungwe Forest in southwest Rwanda (roughly 85 km northeast of Muusi) in 1990 (Dowsett-Lemaire 1990); and one netted, and later photographed, about 50 m inside the forest at Kabembwe in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (03°52' S, 28°56' E, 1840 m), about 95 km south of Muusi in 1996 (Butynski *et al.* 1997).

The following factors make it almost certain that the bird we saw was a Congo Bay Owl: (1) habitat, consisting of montane forest and grassland, which is similar to that described in Butynski *et al.* (1997); (2) size; (3) heart-shaped facial disk; (4) lack of ear-tufts; (5) colour. The spots on the

underparts do not correspond to the published description of the single specimen of the Congo Bay Owl, in which the underparts are stated to be dark russet-cream with black streaks on the belly (Fry *et al.* 1988). However, they correspond exactly to the underparts of the Congo Bay Owl in the photograph in Butynski *et al.* (1997).

This species has had several English names. The observations in Burundi and Rwanda make the names Congo Bay Owl and Itombwe Owl inappropriate. Both observations were well outside the Itombwe forest. They were also outside the political jurisdiction of the Congo, and the Burundi bird was outside the catchment area of the Congo River, being on the east side of the Congo-Nile watershed. The forest here extends on both sides, as does the Nyungwe Forest in southwest Rwanda, which is located about 50 km north north-west of Teza along the same watershed. Either African Bay Owl or Prigogine's Owl would seem a more suitable name.

References

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P.W.P. Browne

115 Crichton Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1V8, Canada, e: pbrowne@cyberus.ca

Lynette Browne

232 Edinburgh Street, London, Ontario N6H 1M3, Canada

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Unusual behaviour of a White-naped Raven *Corvus albicollis* with its Superb Starling *Lamprotornis superbus* prey

While visiting Ngulia Safari Lodge, Tsavo West National Park, Kenya, at around 06:30 on 9 August 1996, we were observing two White-naped Ravens *Corvus albicollis*. The ravens were feeding on the remains of the goat carcass hung the previous night on a 6 m tall dead tree in front of the lodge, as leopard bait. A small group of Superb Starlings *Lamprotornis superbus* were foraging on the grassy area in front of the lodge terrace, 15 m from the dry tree. A 1-m high bird bath stood between the starlings and the tree.